homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday - July 30, 1941

Subject: "HOW DOES YOUR SUMMER GARDEN GROW?" Information from Farm Security Officials and Plant Scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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America's defense army is an army of citizens - in fields and gardens as well as in factories and uniforms.. And these summer days America's citizens on the rural home front are busy raising gardens and producing food to feed themselves and other nations. They consider it a patriotic duty as well as a personal necessity for their families.

But gardens are often a problem this time of year, because you can't depend on the weather. Raising enough vegetables all through the summer is much easier if the weather doesn't surprise you and if you have all the rain you want. But in case a drought comes along, as one did in the Southeastern States this year, you may be in a bad fix. Fortunately, there are ways to outwit the heat and dryness. In a lot of sections over the country where high winds, hot weather, and lack of rain are the order of the day, you can still have a good vegetable garden if you build a frame garden ..... but more about frame gardens a little later.

Vegetable experts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture say "Plan for at least 2 or 3 plantings a season. Then you have several chances for success. In parts of the South, for example, August may be the time to plant beans, certain kinds of peas, corn for roasting ears, beets, carrots, and tomatoes." Tomatoes, of course, are more important this year than ever. Great Britain has called for large amounts of canned tomatoes to help win the war, and the more we grow for ourselves, the more we can release for others less fortunate.

Late plantings not only mean fresh vegetables for late weeks of summer and fall, but also give the homemaker good stuff for canning and storing. Late beans

and peas, beets, carrots, and celery are especially good. The root crops and celery grown late are crisp and tender, and of better quality for having escaped the summer's heat. In parts of the South, the late garden is really as important as the early one. When it's dry, hoe or stir the top soil often with a steel rake to help control weeds. Then when it rains, stir the ground just as soon as it's dry enough to work so as to kill the weeds that start sprouting. Be careful though not to cultivate too deeply or too close to the plants or you will injure the shallow roots.

The best gardener keeps close watch of his plants all during the growing season. Go out early in the morning while the dew is still on and see if anything has happened during the night. Maybe some insect has begun an attack, or done some injury you should see to right away. Your garden will be grateful for every little attention, and a visit at least once a day, will help insure you a fine crop of vegetables. Remember too, that a little garden well cared for is better than a big one gone to weeds.

In dry weather it is you, not Nature, who must be responsible for getting water to your plants. The best way to water is not to sprinkle the garden often, but to give the ground a thorough soaking about once a week. After watering the garden, work the surface of the soil as soon as it dries enough. Don't water again until necessary - and then soak the soil as you did before.

Overhead sprinkler irrigation is fine for a garden - if you have the water and facilities to handle it properly. But for a small garden, the ordinary can sprinkler or "water bucket" will get the watering job done. After all the water has soaked into the ground, cover the wet earth in the furrows with dry soil to keep it from baking.

If the weather and the ground are both dry when you want to plant seeds, here's an idea: Open a slight furrow and fill it with water. Then when the water

has penetrated the soil, sow your seeds and cover them with dry earth. This will make your plants stand well, because the moisture feeds upward in the soil just like the oil in a lamp wick.

In choosing a garden spot, you might like to know that plants grown in clay loams often stand dry weather better than those in lighter soil. Also select a location that is protected by a hill, a group of close-growing trees, some buildings, a stone wall, or tight-board fence - if wind is likely to cause damage. You can get fair protection against wind and soil blowing by fastening strips of burlap to the garden fence, or by setting out a hedge.

Even in drought there are certain vegetables that stand up better than others - such as okra, lima beans, crowder and field peas, sweet potatoes, and soybeans for which we are cultivating a taste. So choose these when you are planting. Greens of different kinds are so important that many wise farm families are willing to 'haul water' for them if necessary.

Farm families living where summer winds or heat make ordinary gardening almost out of the question, the frame garden may be your answer. A frame garden, you know, is just a weatherproof frame with a cloth or slat-cover enclosing a good seed bed you keep watered all the time.

You can build the frame from almost any kind of material. Some people nail scrap lumber to upright stakes or short posts. Others fasten split poles to uprights and bank them with earth. Still others use log frames, stone frames, or brick frames. Ask for directions for building a frame garden from the Farm Security supervisor in your county, or from your county Extension agent. Or write to the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for information on frame gardens.

Well, more about gardens another day.

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